

Fortnightly Sermon

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THE ONE RELIGION

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THE ONE RELIGION.

"Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?"

1. Corinthians, vi, 2.

Like many a text for a sermon, this is no more than a motto, for I use it not in Paul's meaning. The apostle's intention in the words is very plain. He is reproving Christians for going to law with one another before heathen judges. He says they should settle their disputes by referees among themselves. Indeed, he says, better suffer wrong than bring any quarrels before the "unrighteous," or "unbelievers"—for by both these words Paul names the common law courts of the Roman world. The Christians he calls "saints," and this is a very common use of the term throughout the New Testament. The Greek word translated saints means holy, and is the same word used in the phrase "The Holy Spirit." But, as I say, it has in a multitude of passages the simple sense of converts to Christianity and members of the Christian community. Paul's argument is that, as the saints are to judge the world when Christ reappears in his power and glory, it is a shame if they be not able to judge the small matters of differences among themselves in the present.

But I take the text as a general assertion of pure idealism. It is true, indeed, that the saints shall judge the world; the holy, the high, the generous, the purely honest, and those that aim at unblemished rightness and truthfulness, shall judge the world. For the ideal never will stoop, and as things cannot stand still, but must move, and either the ideal come down or man go up, it is certain that men must move, and the ideal will stay and live in heaven to be worshiped.

But now, why shall the saints judge the world? or rather,

how is it that the good and the true, and they who will not break down the ideal, shall lead and judge? This is a great thought. I know of none more religious or touching more deeply the nature of man and the being of God. The reason the saints shall judge the world is, that saints are seers; that those who really do wish to know and then to follow the one right, beautiful, adorable way, will see it and fail not of it. If any fail, it is because they have a mixture of motives. They are willing to conform, to cut down or pare away the ideal, and take means that are only half fair and good. But no one will fail to see the best way in good time, whose whole heart is for that way when he shall find it. Jesus said this in one of the most profound sayings he ever uttered, according to the fourth Evangelist: "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine or teaching." This is why the saints shall judge the world, because being pure in purpose and method, or willing to do God's will, they are seers, to see the way and know the doctrine, as Jesus said.

Now, seers must see the same things; for they can see only what is to be seen, and see it as it is. God is one and inhabiteth eternity, as saith the prophet, or, in another place, "from everlasting to everlasting he is God,"—which means that the holy and right and victorious way is the same for all eternity. An apostle has said it in another way—"With Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Therefore, the seers who see His way, must see all alike; and whether they be parted by thousands of leagues, or by thousands of years, still they see and speak all alike, for the things they see are eternal with "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." But these things they would not *see* if they wished not to *follow* the eternal. If they were thinking how to mate and match little matters in time, and how to swerve a little from the true way to pick up this advantage, or how, again, to veer a little on another side to catch this gain or that ease, then they would see not the one eternal way, the right, the ideal, the true, which has the power of God to judge the world. But, as they look not at the lower things, but only with a holy and true devotion, at the simple right as it is, they see, and they see alike, and always have said the same things.

I have found great delight, mental and moral glow, spiritual inspiration, in reading the Scriptures of other religions besides the Hebrew and the Christian. And 'tis no wonder; for why should I not be lifted on wings that have proved strong to bear whole nations heavenward? Not alone the Hebrew and Christian histories, preachings, psalms, laws, precepts, exhortations, warnings, have been strength, comfort, and instruction in temple, hall and home, but the Scriptures of all other religions too. All have been mighty to command, to inspire, to uphold holy lives, support self-sacrifice unto death, and sustain humble, life-long faithfulness. Wherefore, I say, 'tis no wonder that holy pages of Scripture which have beamed so much for other men, however of a different climate, countenance and race, should shine also with a white and holy light to me.

Now, in reading these other Scriptures, I have observed four stages in myself. At first I found little in them—only here and there a bit that truly appealed to my mind and stirred me. On the whole I looked on them slightly. I gleaned from them no more than certain precepts. These Scriptures of the nations were alien to me, foreign to my habits of mind and feeling, not fitted to my mental experience or my religious expressions. Hence, as I say, I slighted them, and from my shallow dips into them was wont to return to our own Bible with a new emphasis, an enlarged conception of the vast advantage and superior grandeur of our Scriptures.

My second stage came slowly. It resulted from frequent returns to the other Scriptures, till by many resorts to them and by some happy circumstances I was led to read them deeply and long, and linger over them. Then they became to me far more than an assemblage of precepts, or fields where I might glean here and there some fine bits of moral wisdom. Slowly I entered into the *spirit* of them. I began to go to them as to something living and moving with human life lifting itself to the Divine Life. Then I was impressed, filled and moved; then I admired and revered; because I had come to the *spirit* of them sympathetically in some measure, as those peoples do in large measure whom the Scriptures feed and inspire in the native abodes of them.

My third stage was a return to our own Bible after this

sympathetic and deeper reading of other Scriptures. My former judgment seemed to me to be maintained and assured. The Hebrew Scriptures still seemed exceedingly grander, vaster, richer, deeper than all others. But now I had the advantage—a great one—of better equipment for judging, and I found my love of our own Scriptures quickened and dignified by my sympathy, if I may say so, with SCRIPTURE itself, which I had found living in *all* Scriptures.

This led to the fourth stage, which is a heightened and joyful sense of the greater glory and grandeur of the Hebrew Bible, not merely in comparison with others, nay, nor mainly so, but chiefly by its part in the glory of the whole, because it stands not alone on a plain, but towers above comrade peaks, all of which pierce the heavens. Then the full splendor and the grand height of the Hebrew Scriptures begin to appear, when they show in this fellowship with all Bibles, the most sublime stanzas of one sublime psalm heard everywhere on the earth, which is Religion itself.

This morning I will bring before you some sayings of the holy saints and seers of the world, spoken in differing Scriptures, that you may see once more that they have said the same things, and that all lovers of the truth are one, and that all children of men are one in God.

Take first, some sayings regarding watchfulness, that we must watch ourselves if we will grow in any grace. Now, when we think of this, what shall we look for in the sayings of the saints and seers? First we shall expect the thought that we must *watch ourselves toward God*, which is to say, toward the ideal and the perfect. We have to watch that the aim be worthy of eternal counsels, and then the means worthy of the aim. Every one will say that to set up a wrong end or aim is to make war on God. But many say that, while the aim must be pure and perfect, yet we must consider that we have but poor creatures to work with, who are warped and turned awry, and full of misguidance, passion, pride, and a thousand hindrances. Wherefore, say they, we must come down a little in our means and please the prides and the selfishness, that we may cajole them to good ends. But, to follow low motives and ways to please men, what is this but to be braver toward God than toward men,

thinking that we may outface the perfect and the eternal to gain credit with the transitory and the vain? Again, we shall expect the saints and the seers to say that we must *watch ourselves toward other men*; first, that we judge rightly, as we cannot do if we judge proudly or fiercely, or selfishly; which Jesus said thus—that if, having a beam in our eye, we try to take out the mote from another's, we cannot do it, nor even see the mote as it is. And, secondly, we must watch ourselves in order that we may be able to help any one; for, if we cannot look after ourselves aright, how can we help others? and if we keep not ourselves in the way, how can we guide others in it?

Here, now, I will read you some sayings from the saints and seers that you may see that truly they do say these things, which we should look for them to say:—

From Buddhist wisdom we have, “The sins of others are seen easily; but if a man look for these and find fault, his own weaknesses will grow.”

Confucius says, “If a man cannot improve himself, how can he improve others. When we see noble men, we should think of equaling them. When we see evil characters, we should turn our look inward and examine ourselves. Only he who has the most complete sincerity under heaven can transform and inspire others.”

Socrates says, “The only short, safe, and good way is to strive to be really good in the things in which we wish to be thought good. Whatever are called virtues among men may be gained by study and exercise.”

Says Confucius again, “To see what is right, and not to do it, is the part of a cowardly mind.”

From the Zoroastrian Scriptures, “Give me, O God, these two desires—to see, and to question myself. Watch thyself with all diligence; master thyself; so mayest thou teach others and subdue them, for thyself is hardest to subdue.”

In like manner Jesus, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”

Take, next, the duty and interest which we name Character, simple goodness, honesty, purity, devotion, unselfishness. What shall we expect the holy seers to say about these? We shall expect them to say the ideal things which are true forever and

ever, from everlasting to everlasting. Therefore, they will say, first, that the goodness and pure virtue which looketh to God for Himself and not for reward or praise or advantage, is the chief of all things to be thought of by men. The seers will say that there is nothing in religion or life like to the preciousness of pure character. Then, secondly, they will say that this always may be had; that outward things not always may be had, for some persons may gain more of them and some less; and often losses happen; but ingenuous goodness *may be had*, for it is in our power to be simply true, and strength is never far distant, but close at hand. Thirdly, we shall expect the seers to say that this pure character grows in us by many small fidelities, by which we become strong for constancy of goodness and for great requirements or exigencies. It has been said truly that by reiterated small choices betwixt good and evil we make our moral state, which thus is a growth very slow, and yet swift too, and momentous past all words. Finally, we shall expect the seers to say that when thus by faithfulness we have attained unto purity of heart and constancy of character, the eyes will be opened to all divinity, beauty, glory, to infinity. Here, now, I will give you some sayings from holy seers, that we may behold whether they do say these things:—

From Buddhist wisdom we have, “If a man conquer in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and if another conquer himself, he is the greater conqueror, and the greatest of all. Think not lightly of evil. Drop by drop the jar is filled. Think not lightly of good. The wise are filled with purity, gathering it drop by drop.”

Zoroaster says, “Adore God by means of sincere actions.”

The Laws of Moses say, “Thou shalt not kill, nor bear false witness, nor covet, nor steal, nor profane the name of God. Thou shalt not oppress another, but love thy neighbor as thyself. Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother. Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man; and fear thy God.”

Jesus, to the same purpose, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Next I will take the thought and grace of love. In this

matter what shall we expect of the seers? First, we shall look for the holy diviners to say that love is the greatest of all powers; that its strength is like almightiness; that it is so strong that even if for a time, nay forever (if we can imagine such a thing), it be without effect on another's heart, still *we* shall be weak in the work and effort if it be not in our own. Secondly, we shall look for the seers to say that love never must be overthrown in us so as to return hatred for hatred; nay, but love for hatred, and peace for anger, and every good for any evil. Again, we shall expect the seers to say that a pure and good love in us, and a greatness and devotion of love, and a great scope and breadth of it, relate us closely to God, for he is infinite love. With this now I will read you some saying of the seers, that we may hear if they say these things about love:—

The Zoroastrian Scriptures say, "Let us be such as help the life of the future."

Confucius says, "Love to speak of the good in others. Treat not others as you would not wish them to treat you. Make happy those who are near, and those who are far will come."

Buddhist wisdom teaches, "If there be any who hate, dwell among them free from hatred. Overcome anger with love, evil with good, the selfish with generosity, the false with truth; for wrath is not stilled by wrath at any time. Anger ceases by love—this is an everlasting law. If one have boundless and impartial good will, where he is the saying is come to pass, This is the abode of holiness."

Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Take next the virtues of simplicity and humility. What shall we look for the holy teachers to say of these things? First, surely they will say that we must ask much of ourselves rather than of others; that if rightly we be simple and lowly in mind, we shall not be asking or demanding always something of others—nay, but rather take with great gratitude what is given, as being more than perchance we deserve, and yet less than we exact of ourselves to give. Nay, but why should I say *exact*, for if we be simple and lowly minded, we shall be outpouring by

nature, and never think of it, except that it is joy. And, secondly, the seers will say that simplicity and humility are especially the graces of unconscious childhood, are like to the beauty and gentleness and softness of a simple child; and that when this continues into mid-life, and goes on upward till it sits like a crown on the head of age, which is to say, when the simplicity of the child is joined with the knowledge of the man, then comes to pass the greatest beauty. Again, the seers will say that there is vast strength and power in humbleness and simpleness of spirit; that these graces have a strength like to love, and perhaps a very part thereof, for what great love ever was there which was not simple and humble? Wherefore, it is the meek, the patient and the simple that prevail at last. Listen now to a few words from some of the holy teachers on these points:—

Confucius says, "He who requires much from himself and little from others, will save himself from anger. What the noble man seeks is in himself; what the ignoble seeks is in others."

And Mencius says, "The noble man is he who loses not his child-heart."

Socrates teaches, "To want as little as possible is to make the nearest approach to God."

In like manner Jesus, "He who receiveth not the kingdom of heaven like a little child shall in no wise enter therein. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the lowly in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

I will take now the principle and fact of retribution. Of this surely the seers will say that it is certain. They will say that any foe of a good thing who has fallen on it to beat it down,

"Self assured that he prevails,
Sees aloft the red right Arm
Straight redress, the eternal scales."

They will say that our sin shall find us out—nay, that already it has found us out, and never had to look for us, but always was with us; nor hides from us, nor ever lets us hide from ourselves. Again, they will say that the law of retribution is fixed in all things, in the earth, in the waters, in the air, in our bodies, and that all things muster and enlist to punish the evil deed, and that it never escapes, nor can cover itself in any way, because it

drags its own punishment on it by the law and nature of all things. Also the seers will say that though all the elements gather to punish, with pains, weakness, disease, loss, death, whatever eternal councils have judged wicked or wrong, yet the worst penalty is the evil deed itself; for it is worse to be bad than to suffer for being bad, and the greatest punishment is to be what must be punished; and this truth, however it delay, at last will burn its way to us, and on us, till we cry to heaven out of fires of shame. Now I will read you some of the seers' sayings of retribution, from Buddhist Scriptures: "There is a treasure that anyone may possess, laid up in the heart, charity, pity, temperance, a treasure that none can take away; but our sin will come back upon us like fine dust thrown against the wind. Not in the sky nor in the midst of the sea, nor in the clefts of the mountains is any place known where a man may escape from his evil deeds. For the evil doer burns by his own deeds, yea, as if burned by fire. But there is no evil for one who does no evil. Not even divine power could change into defeat a man's victory over himself. As a rock is not shaken by the wind, so the good swerve not in good report or evil report."

Once more, take the subjects that lie close to the heart of religion, at least if we may say that any one grand thought lies closer to religion than another. I mean the thoughts of God and Providence. What shall we expect the holy teachers and diviners to say on these thoughts? Many and great things indeed, neither the number nor the greatness of which I can bring before you now; and yet, I may say also, but few things, for all the thoughts that we can have of God and his ways with us gather together into but two or three very great and glorious thoughts, which hold all the others and gather them in, as the ocean all the rivers. First, we shall expect the seers to speak of the infinite and holy order, which is God's nature shown to us and living in all things. They will speak of the oneness which is in all things, from stars to water-drops, from a beast's pangs to a saint's sorrows, from an animal's love to a man's prayer. Through all, they will tell us, one thought, one life, one love, one law runs never wearied, never changing, never invaded, never broken, nor hindered, but always almighty, and always upbuilding righteousness. Again, the holy diviners will

say: What have we to fear with God? and they will answer: Nothing to fear. For first, we have not God to fear, since "all his power is to do good," and all his eternal glory to bless and preserve. And if we have not to fear God, but only to trust and believe, to wait, pray, give thanks, and never be afraid, then what else can be feared possibly? Surely it is plain that we have either to be afraid of God or of nothing, since everything is in his hands. And, again, we shall look to have the holy teachers tell us that God is not to be argued, or inferred or sought by proofs a long way off, but is to be seen and heard and known about us, and no one so much seen and known; nay, not even ourselves to ourselves, for we lie "dim and invisible in him," knowing him when we can not follow ourselves within his life. Yea, the seers will tell us that God appears to us, and that in all the glory of nature we do look on his face, and in all the sounds of the earth, and most in the human voice, and most in that when most it is filled with love and hope and thankfulness, we do hear with our very ears the voice, the speech of God. Now I will read you some of the sayings of these holy teachers of these thoughts:—

Socrates says, "Let any man be of good cheer about his soul who has ruled his body and delighted in knowledge in this life; who has adorned the soul in her own proper jewels, which are temperance, justice, courage, nobility, and truth. In these arrayed, the soul is ready for the journey even to another world, when the time comes. For if death be the journey to another place, and there all the dead are, what good can be greater than this? Be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth, that no evil can happen to a good man either in life or after death. God orders and holds together the whole universe in which are all things beautiful and good. He keeps it always unimpaired, unconfused, undecaying, obeying his law swifter than thought, and in perfect order."

The Zoroastrian Scriptures say, "Him whom I exalt with my praise I now see with my eye, knowing him to be God, the reality of the good thought, the good word, the good deed."

In like manner Jesus, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing—and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father. Fear ye not therefore. When ye have need, it

shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall say, for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

"We can take the entire range of the religions of the world, and we shall find in all, something of the spiritual element present, something of the endeavor to reach the light, some attempt to articulate, or spell at least, a syllable of the name ineffable. All have aspiration, and all, viewed on the ethical or moral side, have some influence that freely accepted, would lift and improve, if not liberate and sanctify the worshiper. Homer says fittingly, 'all men yearn after the gods.' 'If we will but listen attentively,' says Max Muller, 'we can hear in all religions a groaning of the spirit, a struggle to conceive the inconceivable, to utter the unutterable, a longing after the infinite, a love of God.' St. Augustine declares that 'there is no religion which does not contain some grains of truth,' and Max Mueller again says, 'There is no religion, or if there is, I do not know it, which does not say, 'Do good, avoid evil.'"

"Thanks be to God for his holy saints; thanks be to him who giveth wisdom, Which in all ages entering into holy souls maketh them friends of God and prophets."

O, blessed the fact that we have those who claim us for the ideal, who never will let us down, nor even grant that we shall fail, but hold up our spirits to go in a starry way, and to see light always in the skies whatever the night be. Oh, blessed! that we have the prophets and seers, the saints and diviners who never will permit to us a low aim but always insist on the highest, and then never will allow the highest to be sought in any but the highest way! Who never will bend to low motives, never will seek prides, or advantages, or prejudices, or parties, or hatreds, or anything paltry, but always only the truth of God

*Charles D. B. Mills, in *Unity*, January 24, 1890, on "The Transient and Permanent in Religion."

by the way of the love and peace of God.

And, oh let us give thanks for these deviners or holy souls, *because they are everywhere!* How sad if we only had such teachers, but no others had! How mournful if only in our language their holy words breathed and burned, but in no other tongue! How sorrowful if all men who have not our teacher had no other of like kindling power and pure glory to their souls! O, blessings and thanks, praises and hymns, music and anthems, songs, rejoicings, gratulations and jubilees, that it is not so—that never any people is without witness of God; never any tongue without its Scriptures; never any world in all the universe of stars but has, we may be sure, its Christs and its holy pages of true religious inspiration; and all are one in the One! For this, songs, triumphs and rejoicings, music and anthems, thanks, blessings, hymns and praises!